

# **The Motion Pictures**

**THE ENCYCLICAL OF HIS HOLINESS**

**POPE PIUS XI**

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## **In Praise of the Encyclical**

**ARCHBISHOP McNICHOLAS**

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## **Pope Pius Speaks on the Movies**

**FRANCIS TALBOT, S.J.**

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## **Pope Lauds Work of Legion**

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# ENCYCLICALS



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## On Clean Motion Pictures

*The Encyclical, "Vigilanti Cura," issued by His Holiness,  
Pope Pius XI, on July 2, 1936.*

IN following with vigilant eye, as Our pastoral office requires, the beneficent works of Our Brethren in the Episcopate and of the Faithful, it has been highly pleasing to Us to learn of the fruits already gathered and of the progress which continues to be made by that prudent initiative launched more than two years ago as a holy crusade against the abuses of motion pictures, and which was in a special manner entrusted to the Legion of Decency.

It is an excellent experiment, that now offers Us a most welcome opportunity, manifesting more fully Our thought in regard to a matter which touches intimately the moral and religious life of the entire Christian People.

### GRATITUDE EXPRESSED TO HIERARCHY OF UNITED STATES

First of all, We express Our gratitude to the Hierarchy in the United States of America, to the Faithful who co-operated with them, for the important results already achieved, under their direction and guidance, by the Legion of Decency. And Our gratitude is all the livelier for the fact that We were deeply anguished to note with each passing day the lamentable progress, *magni passus extra viam*, of the motion picture art and industry in the portrayal of sin and vice.

I. As often as the occasion has presented itself, We have considered it the duty of Our high office to direct to this condition the attention not only of the Episcopate and clergy, but also of all men who are right-minded and solicitous for the public weal.

In Our Encyclical "Divini Illius Magistri," We had already deplored that "potent instrumentalities of publicity (such as motion pictures), which might be of great advantage to learning and education were they properly directed by healthy principles, often unfortunately serve as an incentive to evil and passion and are subordinated to sordid gain."

In August of 1934, addressing Ourselves to a delegation of the International Federation of the Motion Picture Press, We pointed out the very great importance which the motion picture has acquired in our days, and its vast influence alike in promotion of good and insinuation of evil. We called to mind that it is necessary to apply to the cinema a supreme rule which must direct and regulate even the highest art in order that it may not find itself in continual conflict with Christian morality, or even simply with human morality based upon natural law. The essential purpose of art, its *raison d'être*, is to assist in the perfecting of the moral personality, which is man. For this reason it must itself be moral.

#### OTHER ADMONITIONS ON SUBJECT RECALLED

And We concluded, amid the manifest approval of that elect body—a memory still dear to Us—by recommending to them the necessity of making the motion picture “moral, an influence for good morals, an educator.”

And even as recently as April of this year, when We had happiness in receiving in audience a group of delegates of the International Congress of the Motion Picture Press held in Rome, We again drew attention to the gravity of the problem, and warmly exhorted all men of good will, in the name not only of religion but also of the true moral and civil welfare of the people, to use every means in their power, such as the press, to make of the cinema a valuable auxiliary of instruction and education rather than of destruction and ruin of the soul.

The subject, however, is of such paramount importance in itself, and because of the present condition of society, that We deem it necessary to return to it again, not alone for the purpose of making particular recommendations as on past occasions, but rather with a universal outlook, which while embracing the needs of your own dioceses, Venerable Brethren, takes into consideration those of the entire Catholic world.

It is, in fact, urgently necessary to make provision that in this field also, progress of art, science and human technique in the industry, since they are all true gifts of God, may be ordained in His glory and to the salvation of souls, and may be made to serve in a practical way to promote the

extension of the Kingdom of God upon earth. Thus, the Church bids us pray that we may all profit by them in such manner as not to lose the eternal good: *sic transeamus per bona temporalia ut non amittamus aeterna*.

#### LEGION OF DECENCY IS WARMLY PRAISED

Now, then, it is a certainty which can readily be verified that the more marvelous is the progress of the motion picture art and industry, the more pernicious and deadly has it shown itself to morality, religion, and even to the very decencies of human society.

The directors of the industry in the United States recognized this fact themselves, when they confessed that the responsibility before the people and the world was their very own. In the agreement entered into by common accord in March, 1930, solemnly sealed, signed and published in the press, they formally pledged themselves to safeguard in the future the moral welfare of patrons of the motion picture.

It is promised in this agreement that no film which lowers the moral standard of spectators, which casts discredit on natural or human laws, or arouses sympathy for their violation, will be produced.

Nevertheless, in spite of this wise and spontaneously taken decision, those responsible showed themselves incapable of carrying it into effect. It appeared operators were not disposed to stand by principles to which they obligated themselves. Since, therefore, the above-mentioned undertakings proved they have but slight effect, since the parade of vice and crime continued on the screen, the road seemed almost closed to those who sought honest diversion in the motion picture.

In this crisis, you Venerable Brethren, were among the first to study the means of safeguarding the souls entrusted to your care. You launched the Legion of Decency as a crusade for public morality designed to revitalize the ideals of natural and Christian rectitude. Far from you was the thought of doing damage to the motion picture industry; rather, indeed, did you arm it beforehand against the ruin which menaces every form of recreation which in the guise of art degenerates into corruption.

Your leadership called forth the prompt and devoted loyalty of your faithful people. Millions of American Catholics

signed the pledge of the Legion of Decency, binding themselves not to attend any motion picture which was offensive to Catholic moral principles or to the proper standards of living. We thus were able to proclaim joyfully that few problems of these latter times have so closely united the Bishops and the people as the one resolved by coöperation in this holy crusade. Not only Catholics, but also high-minded Protestants and Jews and many others accepted your lead and joined their efforts with yours in restoring wise standards, both artistic and moral, to the motion picture.

#### URGES CONTINUANCE OF FILM CRUSADE

It is an exceedingly great comfort to Us to note the outstanding success of the crusade. Because of your vigilance and because of the pressure which has been brought to bear by public opinion, the motion picture has shown improvement from the moral standpoint: crime and vice are portrayed less frequently; sin no longer is so openly approved or acclaimed; false ideals of life no longer are presented in so flagrant a manner to the impressionable minds of youth.

Although in certain quarters it was predicted that artistic values in the motion picture would be impaired seriously by the reform insisted upon by the Legion of Decency, it appears quite the contrary happened and the Legion of Decency has given no little impetus to efforts to advance the cinema on the road to noble artistic significance by directing it towards the production of classic masterpieces as well as of original creations of uncommon worth.

Nor have financial investments in the industry suffered, as was foretold gratuitously by many. Those who stayed away from the motion picture theater because it outraged morality are patronizing it now that they are able to enjoy clean films which are not offensive to good morals or dangerous to Christian virtue.

#### UNCEASING VIGILANCE COUNSELED BY POPE

When you started your crusade, it was said your efforts would be of short duration and the effects would not be lasting because, as the vigilance of Bishops and the Faithful gradually diminished, the producers would be free to return again to their former methods. It is not difficult to

understand why certain of these might be desirous of going back to sinister themes which pandered to base desires and which you have proscribed. While representation of subjects of real artistic value and the portrayal of vicissitudes of human virtue require intellectual efforts, toil and ability and at times considerable outlay of money, it is often relatively easy to attract a certain type of person and certain classes of people to theaters which present picture plays calculated to inflame passions and arouse lower instincts latent in human hearts.

Unceasing universal vigilance must, on the contrary, convince the producers that the Legion of Decency has not been started as a crusade of short duration, soon to be neglected and forgotten, but that the Bishops of the United States are determined at all times and at all costs to safeguard the recreation of the people in whatever form that recreation may take.

#### RECREATION MUST BE A FACTOR FOR GOOD

II. Recreation in its manifold variety has become a necessity of people who labor under the fatiguing conditions of modern industry. But it must be worthy of the rational nature of man and therefore must be morally healthy. It must be elevated to the rank of a positive factor for good, and must seek to arouse a noble sentiment. A people who, in time of repose, give themselves to diversions which violate decency, honor or morality; to recreations which, especially to the young, constitute occasions for sin, are in grave danger of losing their greatest, even their national power.

It admits of no discussion that the motion picture has achieved in these last years a position of universal importance among modern means of diversion.

There is no need to point out the fact that millions of people go to motion pictures every day; that motion picture theaters are being opened in ever-increasing numbers in civilized and semi-civilized countries; that the motion picture has become the most popular form of diversion which is offered for the leisure moments, not only of the rich, but of all classes of society.

At the same time there exists today no means of influencing the masses more potent than the cinema. The reasons for this is to be sought for in the very nature of the

pictures projected upon the screens, in the popularity of the motion picture plays and in the circumstances which accompany them.

#### PECULIAR POWER OF MOTION PICTURE

The power of the motion picture consists in this: that it speaks by means of vivid and concrete imagery, which the mind takes in with enjoyment and without fatigue.

Even the crudest and most primitive minds, which have neither the capacity nor the desire to make the efforts necessary for abstraction or deductive reasoning, are captivated by the cinema. In place of the efforts which reading or listening demand, there is the continued pleasure of a succession of concrete and, so as to speak, living pictures.

This power is still greater in the talking picture, for the reason that the interpretation becomes even easier and the charm of music is added to the action and drama. The dances and variety acts which sometimes are introduced between films serve to increase the stimulation of the pageant.

Since, then, the cinema is in reality an object lesson which, for good or for evil, teaches the majority of men more effectively than abstract reasoning, it must be elevated to conformity with the aims of the Christian conscience and saved from depraving or demoralizing effects.

#### BAD FILMS OCCASION SIN AND CREATE PREJUDICES

Everyone knows what damage is done to the soul by bad motion pictures. They are occasions of sin; they seduce young people along the ways of evil by glorifying the passions; they show life under a false light; they cloud ideals; they destroy pure love, respect for marriage and affection for the family. They are capable also of creating prejudices among individuals, misunderstandings among nations, among social classes, and among entire races.

On the other hand, good motion pictures are capable of exercising a profoundly moral influence upon those who see them. In addition to affording recreation, they are able to arouse noble ideals of life, to communicate valuable conceptions, to impart better knowledge of the history and beauties of the fatherland and other countries, to present truth and virtue under attractive forms, to create at least the flavor of understanding among nations, social classes and races,



to champion the cause of justice, to give new life to the claims of virtue, to contribute positively to the genesis of a just social order in the world.

These considerations take on greater seriousness from the fact that the cinema speaks not to individuals but to multitudes, and does so in circumstances, time, place, and surroundings which are the most apt to arouse unusual enthusiasm for good as well as for bad and to conduce to that collective exultation which, as experience teaches us, may assume the most morbid form.

#### THEATERS BRING CINEMA TO CENTER OF POPULAR LIFE

A motion picture is viewed by people who are seated in a dark theater, and whose faculties, mental, physical, and often spiritual, are relaxed. One does not need to go far in search of these theaters: they are close to home, to church, to school, and they thus bring the cinema to the very center of popular life.

Moreover, the acting out of the plot is done by men and women selected for their art, for all those natural gifts, the employment of those expedients, which can become, for youth particularly, the instruments of seduction. Further, the motion picture has enlisted in its service luxurious appointments, pleasing music, the vigor of realism and every form of whim and fancy. For this very reason it attracts and fascinates particularly the young, adolescent, or even the child. Thus, at the very age when moral sense is being formed, when notions and sentiments of justice and rectitude, of duty, obligations and ideals of life are being developed, the motion picture, with its direct propaganda, assumes a position of commanding influence.

It is unfortunate that in the present state of affairs this influence is frequently exerted for evil. So much so that when one thinks of the havoc wrought in the souls of youth and childhood, of the loss of innocence so often suffered in motion picture theaters, there comes to mind the terrible condemnation pronounced by Our Lord upon the corrupters of little ones: "But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea."

### CALLS ON BISHOPS OF ENTIRE WORLD

It is therefore one of the supreme necessities of Our time to watch and to labor to the end that the motion picture be no longer a school of corruption but that it be transformed into an effectual instrument for the education and elevation of mankind.

And here We record with pleasure that certain governments, in their anxiety over the influence exercised by the cinema in the moral and educational fields, have with the aid of upright and honest persons, especially fathers, mothers, and families, set up reviewing commissions and constituted other agencies which have to do with motion picture production, in an effort to direct motion pictures, for inspiration, to national works of great poets and writers.

It was most fitting and desirable that you, Venerable Brethren, should have exercised a special watchfulness over the motion picture industry which your country so highly developed and which is a great influence in other quarters of the globe. It is equally the duty of Bishops of the entire Catholic world to unite in vigilance over this universal and potent form of entertainment and instruction, to the end that they may be able to place a ban on bad motion pictures because they are an offense to moral and religious sentiment and because they are in opposition to the Christian spirit and to its ethical principles.

There must be no weariness in combating whatever contributes to lessening the people's sense of decency and honor.

### OBLIGATION WHICH BINDS BISHOPS AND FAITHFUL

This is the obligation which binds not only Bishops, but also the Faithful, and all decent men who are solicitous for the decorum and moral health of the family, the nation and human society in general.

In what, then, must this vigilance consist?

III. The problem of the production of moral films would be solved radically if it were possible for us to have the production wholly inspired by the principles of Christian morality. We can never sufficiently praise all those who have dedicated themselves, or who are to dedicate themselves, to the noble cause of raising the standard of the motion picture to meet the needs of education and the requirements of Christian conscience.

For this purpose they must make full use of the technical ability of experts, and not permit the waste of effort and money by the employment of amateurs.

But since We know how difficult it is to organize such an industry, especially because of considerations of a financial nature, and since on the other hand it is necessary to influence the production of all films so they may contain nothing harmful from the religious, moral or social viewpoint, pastors of souls must exercise their vigilance over films wherever they may be produced or offered to Christian peoples.

#### APPEAL TO CATHOLICS PROMINENT IN MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY

As to the motion picture industry itself, We exhort Bishops of all countries, but in particular you, Venerable Brethren, to address your appeal to those Catholics who hold important positions in this industry. Let them take serious thought of their duties and the responsibility which they have as children of the Church to use their influence and authority for the promotion of the principles of sound morality in the films which they produce or aid in producing.

The number of Catholics who are executives, directors, authors or actors is not inconsiderable, and it is unfortunate their influence has not always been in accordance with their Faith and their ideals. You will do well, Venerable Brethren, to pledge them to bring their profession into harmony with their conscience as respectable men and followers of Jesus Christ.

In this as in every other field, the apostolate of pastors of souls will surely find the best collaborators in those who fight in the ranks of Catholic Action, and in this letter We cannot refrain from addressing to them a warm appeal that they give this cause their full contribution and their unwearying and unfailing activity.

From time to time Bishops will do well to recall to the motion picture industry that amid the cares of their pastoral ministry they as Bishops are under obligation to interest themselves in every form of decent and healthy recreation because they are responsible before God for the moral welfare of their people, even during their leisure.

### MUST PROCLAIM DANGER TO NATION'S MORAL FIBRE

Their sacred calling constrains them to proclaim clearly and openly that unhealthy and impure entertainment destroys the moral fibre of the nation. They will likewise remind the motion picture industry that the demands they make regard, not only Catholics, but all who patronize the cinema.

In particular, you, Venerable Brethren of the United States, will be able to insist with justice that the industry in your country has recognized and accepted its responsibility before society.

The Bishops of the whole world will take care to make clear to leaders of the motion picture industry that the force of such a power of universality as the cinema can be directed with great utility to the highest ends of individual and social improvement. Why, indeed, should there be a question of merely avoiding evil? Why should the motion picture simply be a means of diversion and light relaxation to occupy an idle hour? With its magnificent power, it can and must be a light and a positive guide to what is good.

And now, in view of the gravity of the subject, we consider it timely to come down to certain practical indications.

### ANNUAL PLEDGES: LISTS IN THE THREE CATEGORIES

Above all, all pastors of souls will undertake to obtain each year from their people a pledge similar to the one already alluded to which was given by their American brothers, in which they promised to stay away from motion picture plays which were offensive to truth and Christian morality.

The most efficacious manner of obtaining these pledges promises to be through the parish church or school, by enlisting the earnest coöperation of all fathers and mothers of families who are conscious of their grave responsibility.

The Bishops will also be able to avail themselves of the Catholic Press for the purpose of bringing home to the people the moral duty and effectiveness of this promise.

The fulfillment of this pledge supposes that the people will be made clearly aware of which films are permitted to all, which are permitted with reservations and which are harmful or positively bad. This requires prompt, regular and frequent publication of classified lists of motion picture

plays so as to make the information readily accessible to all. Special bulletins or other timely publications such as the daily Catholic Press may be used for this purpose.

#### REVIEWING OFFICES FOR EACH COUNTRY

Were it possible, it would in itself be desirable to establish a single list for the entire world, because all live under the same moral laws. Since, however, there is here a question of pictures which interest all classes of society, the great and the humble, the learned and the unlettered, the judgment passed upon the film cannot be the same in each case in all respects.

Indeed, circumstances, usages and forms vary from country to country, so it does not seem practical to have a single list for all the world. If, however, films were classified in each country in the manner indicated above, the resultant list would offer in principle the guidance needed.

Therefore, it will be necessary that in each country the Bishops set up a permanent national reviewing office in order to be able to promote good motion pictures, classify others and bring this judgment to the knowledge of the priests and the Faithful. It will be very proper to entrust this agency to the central organization of Catholic Action which is dependent on the Bishops. At all events, it must clearly be laid down that this service of information, in order to function organically and with efficiency, must be on a national basis, that is, it must be carried on by a single central responsibility.

#### INDIVIDUAL BISHOPS CAN APPLY SEVERER CRITERIONS

Should grave reasons really require it, Their Excellencies the Bishops, in their own dioceses through their diocesan reviewing committees, will be able to apply to a national list—which must use standards adaptable to the whole nation—such severer criterions as may be demanded by the character of the region. They may even censor films which are admitted to the general list.

The above-mentioned office likewise will look after the organization of the existing motion picture theaters belonging to parish Catholic associations, so that they may be guaranteed reviewed approval of films. Through the organization of these halls, which often represent a considerable clientele

for the industry, it will be possible to advance a new demand, namely, that the industry produce motion pictures which correspond entirely to our principles. Such films then may readily be shown, not only in Catholic halls but also in others.

We realize the establishment of such an office will involve a certain sacrifice, a certain expense for Catholics of the various countries. Yet the great importance of the motion picture, the necessity of safeguarding the morality of Christian people and of the entire nation, make this sacrifice more than justified. Indeed, the effectiveness of our schools, of our Catholic Associations and even of our churches is lessened and endangered by the plague of evil and pernicious motion pictures.

#### INFORMATION EXCHANGE AMONG THE COUNTRIES

The office force must be composed of persons who are familiar with the technique of the motion picture and who at the same time are well-grounded in the principles of Catholic morality and doctrines. They must, in addition, be under the guidance and direct supervision of a priest chosen by the Bishop.

Opportune understandings for the exchange of that information among offices of the various countries will conduce to greater efficiency and harmony in the work of reviewing films, while due consideration will be given to varying conditions and circumstances.

It will thus be possible to achieve unity of outlook in the judgments and communications appearing in the Catholic Press of the world.

These offices will profit, not only by the experiments made in the United States, but also by the accomplishments of Catholics of other countries in the motion picture field.

Even if employees of the office—with the best good will and intentions—should make an occasional mistake, as happens in all human affairs, the Bishops in their pastoral prudence will know how to apply effective remedies to safeguard in every possible way the authority and prestige of the office itself. This may be done by strengthening the staff with more influential men or by replacing those who have shown themselves less capable of performing their delicate duties.

WILL ACCOMPLISH GREAT WORK FOR MORALITY  
OF THEIR PEOPLE

If the Bishops of the world assume their share in the exercise of this painstaking vigilance over the motion picture—and of this We, who know their pastoral zeal, have no doubt—they will certainly accomplish a great work for the protection of the morality of their people during their moments of leisure and recreation.

They will win the approbation and approval of all right-thinking men, Catholic and non-Catholic, and they will help assure that this great international force—the motion picture—shall be directed toward the noble end of promoting the highest ideals and the truest standard of life.

That these desires which well in Our paternal heart may be realized, We employ the help of the grace of God and in pledge thereof, We impart to you, Venerable Brethren, and to the clergy and the people entrusted to you, Our Affectionate and Apostolic Benediction.

# In Praise of the Encyclical

MOST REV. JOHN T. McNICHOLAS, O.P.

*As issued by the N. C. W. C.*

THE latest Encyclical of Pope Pius XI, addressed to the American Bishops and to other Ordinaries enjoying peace and communion with the Apostolic See, on Motion Pictures, is an evidence of the Holy Father's world vision and his unceasing solicitude for souls. The Pontificate of Our Holy Father during fifteen years shows that His Holiness is moved always by the compelling love of Christ for souls; it is the principle according to which he solves the problems of world-wide importance.

## HIS MASTERFUL GRASP

It is natural, therefore, to find the Holy Father giving his attention to the greatest opinion-forming agencies of the world. His many pronouncements, and his latest Encyclical, on the cinema show his masterful grasp not only of the essentials of the motion picture problem, but even of its details to a degree that seems almost incredible. He recognizes that the cinema is one of the most potent influences for good or for evil. As the supreme moral teacher, he speaks to the world on this subject.

The sane judgment of the American Bishops, manifested during 150 years, proves them to be a conservative body of men. While always thinking of the best interests of the people, they are slow to take public, concerted action against evils. Because the American motion pictures had become one of the most corrupting influences of all ages, it was recognized that the ordinary procedure of each Bishop doing what he individually thought best in his diocese would not be efficacious. The suppression of the evil could be accomplished only by the coöperation of all the Bishops and the co-ordination of all the forces at their disposal.

## CALLED BY PAPAL LEGATE

The call for united action on the part of the Bishops came from His Excellency the Most Rev. Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, at the charity conference of New York, October, 1933. The Apostolic Delegate said:



Wherever the Church is developing her holy mission, she has grave needs. And everywhere the forces of evil are working ceaselessly to restrict her in the fulfillment of her divine mission of saving souls. An example in our day is the moving picture, with its incalculable influence for evil. What a massacre of the innocence of youth is taking place hour by hour. How shall the crimes that have their direct source in immoral pictures be measured? Catholics are called by God, the Pope, the Bishops and the priests to a united and vigorous campaign for the purification of the cinema, which has become a deadly menace to morals.

In November, 1933, eighty Bishops met in Washington in their Annual Conference. An Episcopal Committee was appointed to study the practical measures to be taken in order to correct at their source the evils of the cinema. The members of the original Committee were Bishops Cantwell of Los Angeles, who pleaded so eloquently with his brother Bishops not to delay a moment in launching a nation-wide offensive against the salacious motion pictures; Bishop Boyle of Pittsburgh, Bishop Noll of Fort Wayne, and the writer. Bishop Donahue, Auxiliary Bishop of New York, was named to the Committee in November, 1935. Suggestions were sought several times from the Bishops of the country as to what action should be taken. The Legion of Decency was founded, with results that were most gratifying.

#### CLASSIFY PICTURES

In November, 1934, His Eminence Cardinal Mundelein was asked by the Bishops' Conference to classify pictures for all the dioceses. This was generously done by His Eminence without cost to the Conference.

In November, 1935, owing to the fact that New York is the distributing center of motion pictures, the Bishops' Conference asked His Eminence Cardinal Hayes to assume the responsibility of classifying pictures. His Eminence graciously consented.

It cannot be denied that the producers have made pictures of a higher moral quality owing to the activity of the Legion of Decency and coöperation of many other groups. Reports show that unfortunately some pictures have been produced and shown which have fallen below the standards that decency demands.

While acknowledging good will on the part of most producers, it must be admitted that they do not understand

what is meant by the fixed and unchangeable Christian principles of morality. Clean motion pictures during the past two years have resulted in better box office receipts. This is very complimentary to the American public. While it continues, Hollywood will undoubtedly be sympathetic to the purposes of the Legion of Decency. But there must be no deceiving ourselves. "Unceasing universal vigilance," as the Holy Father says, is most necessary. "The Bishops of the United States," continues His Holiness, must be "determined at all times and at all costs to safeguard the recreation of the people."

It is most gratifying to the Bishops of the United States to have the work of the Legion of Decency commended so highly by His Holiness, the supreme teacher of morality, and to have definite instructions given by the Holy See not only to the Bishops of America but to those of the whole world. The decision of the American Bishops to make the Legion of Decency a permanent organization is now confirmed by Pontifical prescription. By whatever name the work of the Legion of Decency may be known in other countries, it is pleasing to know that the Holy See has made it universal.

## Pope Pius Speaks on the Movies

FRANCIS TALBOT, S.J.

*Reprinted from America in the issue of July 18, 1936.*

WHOEVER may have doubted about two matters may cease speculating. The first matter concerns the Papacy, and especially the Papacy under the present reigning Pontiff. It is alert; it is contemporary up to the hour of each passing day; it is accurately and comprehensively informed; it sees good and bad in human affairs with clear eyes, and has clear vision of the power of good and bad; it is as interested in the helpfulness of science as of art; it is fair, balanced, decisive in its judgments. The second matter amounts to this: the Legion of Decency has attained its objective in the United States, and has been accorded enthusiastic praise in the Encyclical "Vigilante cura" of Pope Pius XI.

The Encyclical on the Motion Pictures issued on July 2nd is profoundly significant. Breaking it up into its basic ideas, one finds that it concerns itself with both the positive and negative aspects of motion pictures as art, recreation, science and industry; with directive and legislative enactments of a practical nature; with true principles of morality and citizenship; with a look at the past of the industry and an exhortation for the future of the art.

His Holiness spares no reproaches for the movies up till the time the Bishops of the United States decided that vigorous action must be taken. He recurs again and again to the "lamentable progress of the motion picture art and industry in the portrayal of sin and vice." He refers to the fact that they "often, unfortunately, serve as an incentive to evil and passion and are subordinated to sordid gain." He notes that "the more marvelous is the progress of the motion picture art and industry, the more pernicious and deadly has it shown itself to morality, to religion, and even to the very decencies of human society." He enumerates the damage done by motion pictures and the havoc wrought in the

souls of youth. Such evils were pointed out by Catholic leaders in this country, in growing volume, before 1934, but seldom so succinctly and pointedly as by Pope Pius.

His mind, however, is expressed with equal emphasis on the power for good inherent in motion pictures. He recognizes them as being of "great advantage to learning and education were they properly directed by healthy principles"; as "valuable auxiliaries of instruction and education"; as a most potent means of influencing the masses; as of a nature to "teach the majority of men more effectively than abstract reasoning" can teach; so that "the motion picture with its direct propaganda assumes a position of commanding influence."

Having established, throughout the Encyclical this thesis on the power of the motion pictures *for good*, His Holiness goes beyond and urges that the cinema be directed in its possibilities *for good*. It is this feature of the Papal pronouncement that this Review seizes most avidly. As *America* has lead in the attack on evil motion pictures, it will use all effort in plans for the production of good motion pictures made under Catholic auspices and fully expressive of Catholicism.

Several times does His Holiness give the lead in this endeavor. He would wish that the existing industry produce pictures that are acceptable to decent people, Catholic and non-Catholic. He indicates that he wishes more. He states that the pictures "may be made to serve in a practical way to promote the extension of the kingdom of God upon earth." He notes later that the cinema "must be elevated to conformity with the aims of the Christian conscience," that "it be transformed into an effectual instrument for the education and elevation of mankind." Most revealing is his assertion: "The problem of the production of moral films would be solved radically if it were possible for us to have the production wholly inspired by the principles of Christian morality."

With wisdom does the Pope make two observations about motion pictures. One is that "it is necessary to apply to the cinema a supreme rule which must direct and regulate even the greatest of arts in order that it may not find itself in continual conflict with Christian morality or even simply with human morality based upon natural law. The essen-

tial purpose of art, its *raison d'être*, is to assist in the perfecting of moral personality, which is man. For this reason it must itself be moral." The cinema is an art, however, that involves predominantly the purpose of recreation. Hence, he asserts in another part of the Encyclical: "Recreation in its manifold variety has become a necessity of people who labor under the fatiguing conditions of modern industry. But it must be worthy of the rational nature of man and, therefore, must be morally healthy. It must be elevated to the rank of a positive factor for good and must seek to arouse a noble sentiment."

All of these statements in the Encyclical are guides for our future. They lead the way for the establishment of that final desideratum: a Catholic motion picture producing company.

## Pope Lauds Work of Legion

*As Issued by the N. C. W. C.*

**E**XPRESSING his views on the struggle to cleanse motion pictures in an address to delegates to the Congress of the International Federation of the Motion Picture Press on April 21, 1936, His Holiness Pope Pius XI seized the opportunity to laud the work done by Catholic women of Switzerland and the Legion of Decency in the United States to raise the standard of motion picture entertainment.

"We fully agree," Pope Pius said, "when one says that all citizens in every country should collaborate in elevating motion pictures, as was done by the Swiss women and by the Bishops, Catholics and other honest citizens of the United States, and Our heartfelt praise goes forth to them."

The Holy Father began his discourse by expressing his delight with the results of the Congress. Above all, the Holy Father congratulated Dino Alfieri, Under-Secretary in the Italian Ministry for Press Propaganda, for his affirmation of the necessity always to have more salutary and effective control over the motion picture press. Control, His Holiness said, must be exercised widely and profoundly, because no motion picture production should find it possible to escape control, which must be just—avoiding any excess or a too

benevolent attitude that could be used as a passport for improper productions.

Pope Pius also congratulated Signor Fontana, head of the Italian delegation to the Congress, who had set forth the necessity for elevating the motion picture press and rendering it independent of the motion picture producers. The Holy Father also extended his congratulations to the head of the French delegation, who invited newspapers and journalists to contribute to the artistic and moral elevation of the motion picture press and of motion picture productions.

Recalling the millions of persons who daily attend the exhibition of motion pictures, Pope Pius emphasized the terrible influence of immoral motion picture productions. This is true, His Holiness said, not so much from the religious point of view, because the Catholic Church has the divine, unfailing promise, but from the point of view of the family, society and the nation. The Church, Pope Pius pointed out, has resisted all trials for two thousand years and will continue to resist them in the future. But, he added, people and nations have not the same divine promises, and history records the real decadence and disasters that have befallen not a few peoples and nations. Therefore, the Holy Father said, there is need to tremble before the real intoxication of souls and the obscuration of intelligences deriving from immoral motion pictures.

Pope Pius concluded his discourse by recalling the tremendous responsibility which rests upon the motion picture press, because, he said, if it had always attributed praise and blame according to the principles and virtues of truth and justice many evils would have been avoided. If this is done in the future, His Holiness added, it will deserve well of mankind.

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# Quotation:

## Revealing a New "America"

*America*, the renowned Catholic review of the week edited by the Jesuit Fathers, has a Fourth of July celebration all its own this year. The issue dated the anniversary of our country's independence appears in a new format, arrangement of contents, cover design and new paper stock. Every one of these changes is a decided improvement in the publication. And, to complete the renovation, *America* will have a new type face for its issue of July 11th. . . .

*America* is indeed a thing of beauty. The new editor, the Rev. Francis X. Talbot, S.J., and his associates are to be congratulated upon an outstanding achievement. *America* now with its arrangement of special articles, titled in modern bold type faces, is a striking presentation of black and white. Everything stands out clearly, and the reader will be certain to derive comfort as well as inspiration from perusal of the new *America*.

Under Father Talbot's direction, *America*, we all may be sure will know the new editor's capacity and the record of his Jesuit associates is certain to live up to the weekly's traditions. It has always been a forceful exponent of Catholicity, never forgetting that dignity and avoidance of coarse pugnacity are expected from true spokesmen for the Church. His associates in the Catholic press wish Father Talbot well in his important mission, and they feel that the changed appearance in *America* that has come with his editorship is an indication that other improvements may be expected. But it is certain he and his fellow Jesuit editors will never retreat from the true mission of the Catholic press.

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To the Editors of the New York *Catholic News*, AMERICA  
is grateful for these words of appreciation

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May We Have Your Help in Spreading AMERICA?

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